

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0674 0762139
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 172139Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3902
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5480
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1649
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 9741
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0450
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0147
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS QUITO 000674

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: VEGA NAMED NEW MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT

¶1. (U) Summary: Felipe Vega de La Cuadra was announced as the next Minister of Government and will be sworn in on March 20, becoming President Palacio's fifth Minister of Government. Vega replaces Alfredo Castillo in the volatile position, after Castillo submitted his resignation amid anti-FTA protests on March 15. The leftist Castillo had largely become marginalized after taking public positions out of sync with other Cabinet members. As Vice Minister, Vega played a prominent role, including in negotiations with striking provinces demanding money from the central government. We are encouraged by the change, which removes the main FTA critic in the Cabinet and promotes Vega, a much more capable political negotiator and strategist. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Vega, 45, was named presidential secretary in September 2005, and then Vice Foreign Minister in January 2006, coinciding with Castillo's naming. A native of the southern highland city of Cuenca, Vega studied Civil Engineering and Philosophy at the University of Cuenca. He also studied psychology at Loja's Technical University. Previous positions include: Cultural Director for the city of Cuenca, Director of Tourism (Santa Cruz, Galapagos), advisor to Congress, governor of Azuay province, Director of the Mariscal Sucre Political and Social Science Institute, and Director and Executive President of Pacifictel.

Comment

¶3. (SBU) Vega was named Vice Minister by Palacio to keep the leftist Castillo from crossing policy lines on the FTA or other USG interests and be the "adult" in the Ministry. Castillo quickly proved to be out of step with the administration, and was frequently contradicted by other Cabinet members. His final transgression was to encourage anti-FTA protesters, violating Palacio's private assurances Castillo would have no role in the issue. Thankfully, the Vega transition will probably not involve staff changes, preserving good cooperation from Ministry staff against trafficking in persons.

JEWELL